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SUBJECT: FATAH-HAMAS AGREE TO RESUME DIALOGUE? OR NOT?

REF: SANA'A 517

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. On March 19 and 20, Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh received PLO and Hamas delegations in Sana'a to discuss an initiative calling for dialogue between Hamas and PLO factions, including Fatah. On March 23, Fatah Revolutionary Council (FRC) member and PLC Fatah-bloc leader Azzam al-Ahmad and Hamas member Mousa Abu Marzouq signed the "Sana'a Declaration," which did not meet all of Abu Mazen's conditions for dialogue with Hamas. PLO Executive Committee Secretary Yasser Abed Rabbo told the Consul General on March

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23 that Abu Mazen was "furious" about the declaration because he opposes dialogue unless Hamas reverses the coup in Gaza, accepts the legitimacy of the PA, and accepts all PLO commitments. Nimer Hamad, Abu Mazen's Political Advisor told ConGen Political Specialist and the media that al-Ahmad was not authorized by Abu Mazen to sign the declaration and had not consulted with the PA President, although al-Ahmad told ConGen Specialist by phone from Sana'a that he had Abu Mazen's backing. Fatah Central Committee (FCC) members, including Ahmad Qureia (Abu Ala'a), publicly endorsed the Sana'a Declaration March 24. End Summary.

Sana'a Declaration

¶2. (C) On March 19 and 20, Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh received PLO and Hamas delegations in Sana'a to discuss reconciliation. The PLO delegation included Fatah Revolutionary Council (FRC) member and PLC Fatah-bloc leader Azzam al-Ahmad, PLO Executive Committee member Saleh Rafat, DFLP member Qais Abu Lailah, and Palestinian Ambassador to Yemen Ahmad al-Deek. The Hamas delegation came from Damascus and included Deputy Head of the Hamas Political Bureau Mousa Abu Marzouq and Hamas members Izzat Rishaq, Muhammad Nasser, and Ihsan Qadous.

¶3. (SBU) The invitations to Sana'a were based on a Yemeni initiative that called for dialogue between Hamas and PLO factions, including Fatah, based on the following principles: (1) abiding by PLO commitments and holding early presidential and legislative elections, (2) resuming national dialogue on the basis of: the 2005 Cairo and 2007 Mecca agreements; the principle that the Palestinian people are an indivisible entity; the fact that the PA consists of an elected presidency, elected parliament, and an executive authority represented by a national unity government; and adherence to all elements of the Palestinian legitimacy, (3) emphasizing the need for all Palestinians to respect and abide by the Palestinian constitution and law, (4) establishing a national unity government to include all factions proportionate to their weight in the PLC, and (5) establishing a committee by

the Arab League including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Jordan.

¶4. (C) On March 23, talks resumed and al-Ahmad and Abu Marzouq signed the "Sana'a Declaration," which read "We, the representatives of Fatah and Hamas, agree to the Yemeni initiative as a framework to resume dialogue between the two movements to return the Palestinian situation to what it was before the Gaza incidents."

Declaration Departs
from Initiative

¶5. (C) In the signed declaration, al-Ahmed accepted two significant changes requested by Hamas: (1) changing language to state that the Yemeni initiative is the framework for dialogue rather than the basis for implementation and (2) replacing language about restoring the status quo ante in Gaza with language about restoring the overall Palestinian situation, including in the West Bank. These two changes stray from Abu Mazen's position that the Yemeni initiative is the bottom line, rather than the starting point for negotiations with Hamas and that Fatah will reconcile with Hamas only if Hamas agrees to hand back control of Gaza to the PA.

Reaction from Ramallah

¶6. (C) Al-Ahmad's actions produced an immediate negative reaction in Ramallah. PLO Executive Committee Secretary Yasser Abed Rabbo told the Consul General on March 23 that al-Ahmad was "free-lancing and has his own agenda, including getting rid of PM Fayyad's government." He added that al-Ahmad is responsible for this "disaster" and that Abu

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Mazen is "furious" because he will only agree to reconciliation if Hamas reverses the coup in Gaza, accepts the legitimacy of the PA, and accepts all PLO commitments. (Comment: Al-Ahmad was Deputy Prime Minister in the national unity government and likely sees the return to dialogue as a precursor to his return in a senior government position. End Comment). Abed Rabbo also said Abu Mazen called al-Ahmad on March 23 to complain about his signing the declaration and stressed that talks should focus on implementing the Yemeni initiative, with all of its conditions, including the return of Gaza to PA control. Abed Rabbo said he will urge Abu Mazen to inform President Saleh that there should be no follow-on talks, except on the basis of implementation of the original Yemeni initiative.

¶7. (C) Fatah members in Abu Mazen's office also told ConGen Political Specialist that Abu Mazen did not authorize al-Ahmad to sign the declaration. Nimer Hamad, Political Advisor to Abu Mazen, told al-Jazeera television March 23 that al-Ahmad "committed a mistake" by signing the declaration without consulting with Abu Mazen. As directed by Abu Mazen, Spokesman for the President Nabil Abu Rudeineh issued the following statement March 23: "Resumption of dialogue ... must take place to implement the Yemeni proposal and not to deal with it as a framework for dialogue because this will not lead to any result. We want the implementation of the proposal. We do not want talks over its articles." (Note: Abu Rudeineh's statement reflects Abu Mazen's view that Hamas must reverse the coup in Gaza, accept the legitimacy of the PA, and accept all PLO commitments in order to resume dialogue. End Note)

FCC Supports Declaration

¶8. (C) Fatah Central Committee (FCC) members, including Ahmad Qureia (Abu Ala'a) and Hakim Bilawi, endorsed the Sana'a Declaration during a March 24 meeting and issued the

following statement: "The Central Committee of Fatah welcomed the outcome of the dialogue in Yemen which resulted in signing a declaration following several days of discussion sponsored by President Saleh." The statement also said the FCC looks forward to the restoration of the status quo in Gaza and national unity.

Al-Ahmad's Take on Declaration

¶9. (C) Al-Ahmad told media March 23 that he consulted with the President's office before signing the declaration and he looks forward to the Government of Yemen setting a date in early April for future talks. By phone from Sana'a March 23, al-Ahmad told ConGen Political Specialist that he agreed to sign the document to avoid leaving Yemen empty-handed. He emphasized, however, that core issues, such as Gaza and a unity government, must be addressed during dialogue. Al-Ahmad expressed anger with Yaser Abed Rabbo and Nabil Abu Rudeineh who both "downplayed the signing of the declaration," he said. Al-Ahmad said President Saleh will ask the Arab Summit in Damascus March 29-30 to endorse the initiative and wants to initiate a Fatah-Hamas dialogue April 15. He speculated, however, that "nothing new" will arise from the initiative, because Hamas will have "the same old positions."

Hamas' Response

¶10. (C) Hamas representatives told the media March 23-24 that the Sana'a Declaration is a guideline for reconciliation talks, not a pre-condition, and that talks will begin April 5 with the first round in the West Bank or Gaza. They added that the Palestinian Ambassador to Yemen, Ahmad al-Deek, will issue invitations for these talks in early April.

Comment

¶11. (C) Abu Mazen's poor management of this issue has left him in a difficult spot. Palestinian public opinion generally favors national reconciliation. By authorizing the delegation to go to Sana'a, Abu Mazen sought to gain public support, but to produce an outcome in which Hamas - not Fatah - would be responsible for the breakdown. At the same time, he emphasized to us that he would not compromise with Hamas. The process in Sana'a got away from Abu Mazen, leaving him on a slippery slope. If he proceeds with dialogue with Hamas, the negotiations now underway with Israel cannot move forward. If he steps back from the efforts at reconciliation begun in Sana'a, he risks being blamed for the failure. The

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deep differences between Hamas and Fatah on the issues suggest that an agreement is unlikely, but Abu Mazen may end up paying a large political cost for this blunder.

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